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FM AMEMBASSY WINDHOEK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0331

UNCLAS WINDHOEK 000045

DEPT FOR OES - Christine Dawson

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL SENV WA

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DELIVERS DEMARCHE: EXPORT PERMITS FOR CHEETAHS

REF: STATE 6254

¶11. This cable includes two action requests. Please see paras 6 and ¶7.

EXPORT OF CHEETAHS

¶12. Ambassador Mathieu delivered reftel demarche to Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Namibia's Minister of Environment and Tourism, on February 4. The Ambassador explained that the U.S. considers the export of 14 cheetahs to be a follow-on to the export of 10 Namibian cheetahs to the United States in 2001. The Ambassador outlined the collaborative effort and objectives of the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park (NZP), Cheetah Conservation Fund, and White Oak Conservation Center. She stressed that all arrangements on the U.S. side have been addressed, including issuance of an import permit valid until July 2009. It would be ideal, the Ambassador noted, if the cheetahs could be transported around April 2009 to avoid the severe change in temperature between Namibia and Virginia. She asked the Minister to approve export permits soon, as that was the final requirement for moving forward.

¶13. The Minister responded that she was "familiar with the whole project and request for additional cheetahs." She added, though, that she needed to engage in additional consultations within government before she would be able to provide final authorization for the export permits.

TROPHY HUNTING

¶14. Nandi-Ndaitwah then raised a separate issue, expressing Namibia's desire for a lifting of the U.S. ban on imports of black rhino and cheetah trophies. The Minister noted that black rhino and cheetah trophies are a potentially highly lucrative segment of Namibia's tourism industry, which is currently dominated by German hunters. Namibian hunting permits can run as high as US\$50,000 for black rhinos and US\$30,000 for cheetahs, and she hoped that the lifting of the U.S. ban on their import would attract more American hunters to Namibia. Increased competition among tourists for limited hunting licenses, she opined, would enable the government to auction the licenses and thereby generate even greater revenues. The Minister recalled that she had raised this issue with the Deputy Assistant Director for International Affairs of the Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Services on the margins of the Hunters' Convention in Reno in January. Nandi-Ndaitwah reported that her USFWS interlocutor had promised to follow up with a letter to the minister detailing the steps Namibia would need to follow to request a lifting of the import ban, but she had not yet received such a letter.

¶15. Comment: Although the Minister's staff has been thoroughly briefed on the request for the export of the 14 cheetahs, and the Minister was generally aware of the issue, it appears that she is not yet prepared to make a decision. We will follow up to press for an expeditious and positive decision. As this matter was discussed at the Embassy of Namibia on October 2008 and Ambassador Nandago appeared supportive, post suggests that AF/S and/or NZP encourage Ambassador Nandago to follow up with the Minister as well.

¶16. Action requested: We would appreciate the Department following up with the Fish and Wildlife Service to confirm that FWS will send a letter (described in para. 4) to Nandi-Ndaitwah.

¶7. Action requested: The Minister plans to attend the Aspen Environment Forum on March 25-28 in Aspen, Colorado. Please advise if FWS, NPZ or other USG entity would be interested in meeting with her in Washington or in Colorado to discuss any conservation or environmental issues. If so, post will advise the Minister.

MATHIEU